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ARTS, CRAFTS AND THE HOME

THE MEANING AND PLACE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL GARDEN

By AGNES EDWARDS

Illustrated by Views of the Estate of Wm. H. Walker, Esq., at Great Barrington, Mass. Ferruccio Vitale, Landscape Architect.

THERE is, perhaps, no country in the world to-day which is advancing so rapidly and so soundly along the lines of æsthetic appreciation as America. To be sure there are few countries in which need for such advancement has been more painfully evident; and fewer yet, in these perilous times, where people have time or heart to think of anything but the fundamental problems of sheer existence. But it is not merely because America is young and ambitious and has time to spend and money to use that she is winging along so magnificently in the upward flight toward beauty, although, of course, all these things are factors. No, the time has come when that aspiration toward the artistic ideals, which lies latent in every human being and every nation, has awakened throughout the length and breadth of the United States, and like the good fairies around the cradle of the infant princess, scholars, artists, students and men of wealth and leisure have banded together to make that wakening memorable.

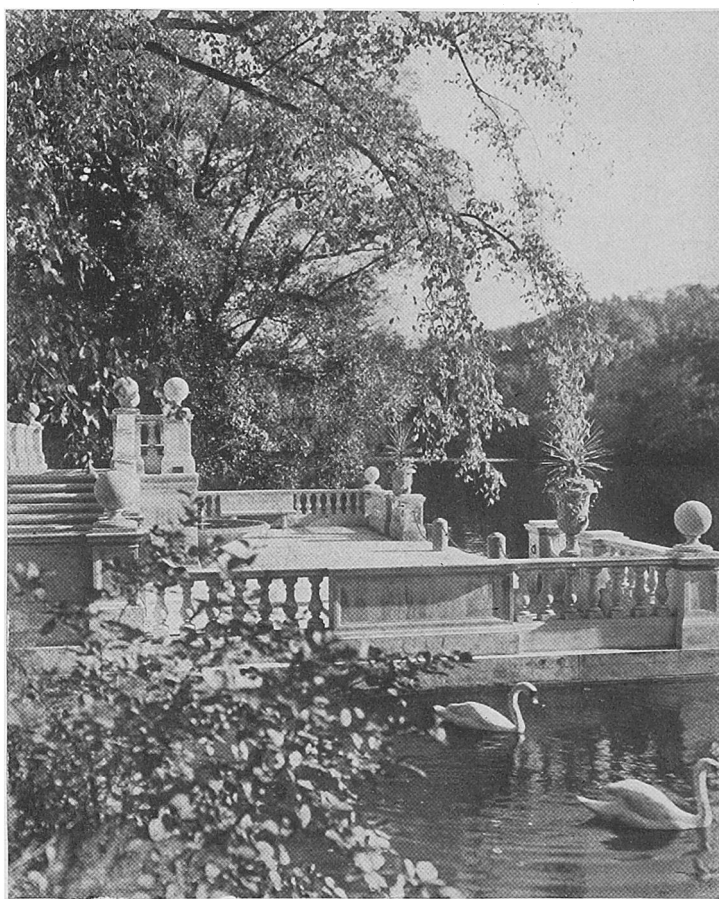
Along with the stirring consciousness that has affected so many branches of the finer intellectual life, the endowment of museums, the preservation of antiquities and the importing of foreign treasures, has come the realization that the perfect dwelling is more, much more, than a perfect house. In other words, landscape architecture with all its significance has become a recognized art and profession among us, and it has been so effectively

linked with architecture in all domestic problems, that the two arts assist and complement each other. For the woman who puts on a lace gown but neglects to change her walking-boots or street hat is not more of an incongruity than the mansion which sits in grandeur on a weedy, barren lot. And for such an incongruity many an architect refuses to be sponsor.

Of course landscape architecture, being a comparatively young profession, is suffering from the various afflictions which youth is heir to: rashness, lack of training and standardization. But while there are hosts of well-meaning young men and women who, because they are fond of flowers and have an agreeable taste in garden-making are calling themselves landscape architects and blithely hanging out their signs, and emblazoning their letter-heads to that effect, there is on the other hand, a small but increasing body of serious, highly trained artists who are devoting their lives to this profession in the highest and most creative sense.

There are blooming into existence, from Pennsylvania to Michigan, from Maine to Florida, gardens which compare, not unfavorably, with the cypress-shaded or velvet-teraced spots of Italy, France and England which have passed into the tradition of the world.

Architectural gardening is only one branch of an infinitely expansive subject. Much could be written in addition to the vast amount that has already been written, about the cottage garden; about the



Boat Landing on the Lake



Interior of Loggia in the Walled Garden

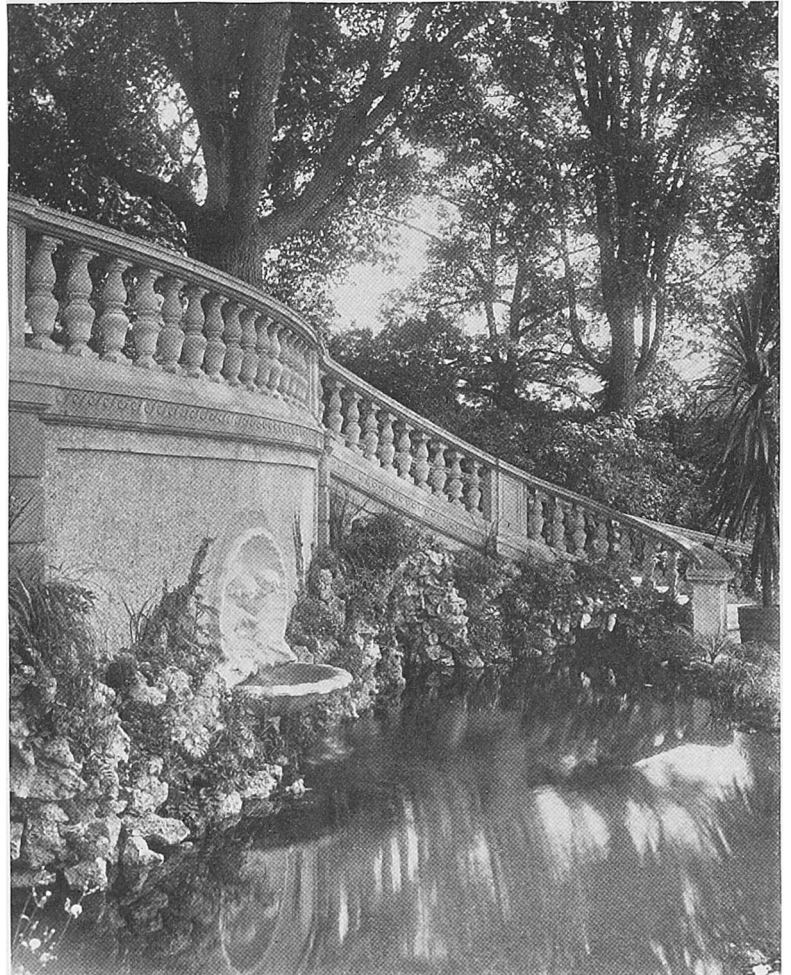
suburban plot and the city lot. Every window box and every trifling annual which is sown by a flower-loving hand contributes to the richness of the garden renaissance which is quickening throughout the land. But from this bewildering array, let us choose a subject which is less often discussed and less generally understood, the architectural garden.

It is characteristic of America that we should generally prefer an old-fashioned, or a Colonial, or an informal garden to the strictly formal type, although there are some well nigh flawless examples of the last in this country. To be sure the term "informal gardening" covers, in popular parlance everything from a border of perennials by the side porch, to the layout of Central Park. We are very apt to forget that the informal garden may be quite as difficult and expensive to create as the formal one, on the same scale. Its apparent naturalness is nearly always the result of studied artifice, as laborious as any of the elaborate topiary effects which commonly characterize, in the popular mind, the formal garden. Furthermore, the informal garden is not universally suitable. As long as we have certain types of houses and classically minded landscape architects, we are going to have formal gardens but "with a difference." Just as the informal garden requires an infinite amount of careful planning which is completely concealed beneath its final, casual appearance, so the formal garden, while maintaining all its fundamental principles of line and

proportion, may be so softened that it may combine the grace of one school with the dignity of the other. It is highly probable that this is to be the distinctively American garden of the future: the garden which preserves the old traditions of balance, order and symmetry, while incorporating the chief charms of spontaneity and unconventionality.

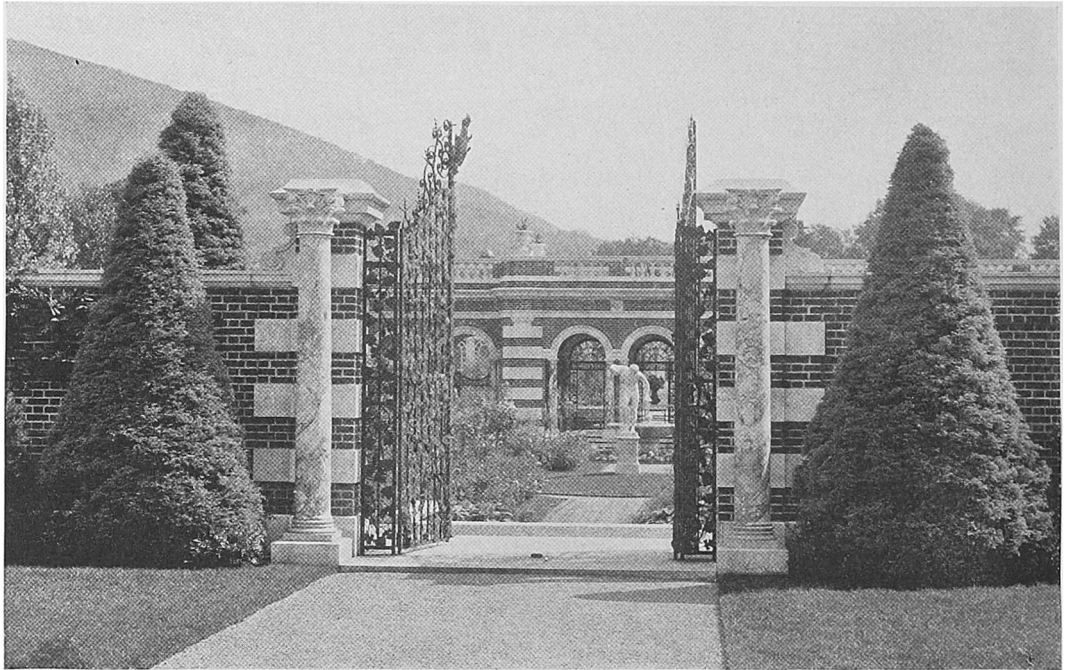
Thus, while the architectural garden demands the formal garden as its base, we must rid ourselves of the idea that this necessitates any stiffly artificial arrangement, in which topiary work and bedding plants are conspicuous. It is merely a delightful product in which respect for form blends with appreciation of flexibility. So much for the formal garden. But what then of the architectural garden? What is it? It is that arrangement of planting which makes the transition between indoors and out as gradual and subtle as possible. In the old Roman days every house had its inner court, which was in reality a garden, and which was as integral a part of the house as the kitchen or dining-room. You can study them yet in pictures, those exquisitely balanced spaces, with their fountains and their bits of statuary: their amphoræ and hermæ, and their straight paths. They are perfect examples of the successful architectural garden.

The same feeling for suitability which created those Roman courtyards impels the modern landscape architect when he is given the problem of



Pool between Stairs

Entrance to
Walled
Garden



reconciling some huge pile of masonry with its surrounding environment in working out the architectural garden. His work lies outside of the house instead of inside, but its purpose is to create an additional room in keeping with the establishment, just as truly as was that other. To be sure the garden itself is only one of the many points which go to make up the landscape problem. The lawns, the greenhouses, the grading, the placing of drives, these are all part of the picture he must work out. It is obvious that an estate of eighty rooms, with its whole village of service quarters, needs an entirely different general treatment and garden treat-

ment than a less pretentious house. Delightful as grandmother's line of hollyhocks may have been by the old homestead, their simple gayety would be no more suitable to such a place as this, than bright peasant china on a banquet table. Here ladies in satin slippers are going to stroll after the dance, and so there must be well-laid walks that will drain quickly and not irregular stepping-stones with mosses crowding up between the cracks. Here are to be fêtes: there must be plenty of space for moving about: there must be seats and fountains, statuary, and balustraded terraces to make a setting for the ceremonial pictures that are to



The
Walled
Garden



A Corner in Circular Garden

form here. Always one must be conscious, in such a place as this, that while nature has been trained to give forth her very choicest, she is nevertheless, completely under the domination of man.

There need be nothing irksome about this "strict accountability." The best blooded horse is also the most responsive to the driver's touch. The most luxuriant garden may reveal in every leaf and curve, the fact that man has planted, pruned and planned. To be sure, even such a pretentious and formal garden as we have suggested need not be uninviting. There are formal gardens in which the prevailing motive is some water feature: others in which topiary work, or some foreign or amusing idea, such as a floral clock or a maze or a grotto or a Dutch or Japanese replica is worked out, or statuary may be the chief accent. But when the aim has been to unite house and grounds so closely that one steps from indoors to outdoors still conscious of the same guarded and continuous taste and cultivation, then the most effective garden is the one in which architecture, rather than any of the other ideas suggested above, is the chief motive. The walks, the seats and furniture, the loggias, the walls, the pavilions and summer

houses, these distinguish the architectural garden from the purely floral, or from the informal, or from any of the other types of formal garden.

There are certain people who have an instinct for what is suitable. To such people it is perfectly obvious that a peculiar house calls for peculiar landscape treatment. They unerringly select the bungalow line as appropriate for rolling country. If they find themselves amidst crags and rocks, they instinctively build turrets and pitched roofs. And they use the same taste and judgment in the decision of the garden which shall most fittingly enhance the house. But the majority of us are not trained in this line, any more than we are trained in tea-tasting or cameo-cutting. The best thing to do in such a case, the only wise thing to do, is to select a landscape architect in whose ideals and integrity we have faith, and empower him to do the proper thing.

If your house is of pretentious dimensions or even if it is along modest lines, and you are seeking a close relation between it and your grounds, rather than contrast, you will probably be most pleased with the architectural garden. If you want a riot of color, or if you are primarily interested in collecting specimens of shrubs or trees; or if you want a leafy retreat rather than an elegant enrichment, then do not choose the architectural garden. How-

ever, with the continual growth of large estates throughout this country, and the constant heightening and complication of social life, one may safely predict that the architectural garden with its stately pleasure walks, its gleam of brick and marble and its decorative conventionality will come more and more into favor with the American people.



Retreat in Walled Garden